



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

WITHOUT NATURAL AFFECTION.

BY EDITH ESCOMBE.

"Without natural affection."—*II. Timothy*, iii. 3.

THERE is probably in every heart an ideal of home, of things as they should be. A household that works without friction ; a marriage of complete satisfaction ; children who live and move and have their being in love, which is reflected from them as is the sun's light from the stars. This is without doubt what home should mean—but does it ?

In this age of domestic transition there are few houses that are not subject to more or less frequent change of service, with the consequent derangement felt indirectly by each and all. By such time as children are promoted to roam at large in a house, the marriage of their parents has reached a fairly stable condition of prosaic indifference, or has developed into a state of friction and irritation,—to conceal which no means whatever are taken ; whilst the really satisfactorily married people are hard to find. Altercations take place in the presence of the children, who, silently, range themselves on one or other side till such time as they are of an age to express their own opinions and views, and thereby add to the general dissension. There are few large families who could not in some measure corroborate such experiences.

There are some parents who think it their duty to say they care equally for all (or both) their children. This, I never believe ; whereas, I respect those parents who allow they have favourites, but who do not reveal which. Children are more outspoken, and will frankly own to a special adherence to one or other parent, or to a particular brother or sister. Wherever a number of people are congregated together—whether young or old—such distinctions are bound to make themselves felt. Were it merely a matter of degrees of loving all might be well, but, unfortunately, there are also degrees of dislike, amounting in some instances to hatred and aversion, which means an endless train of mischief and trouble. This

state of things is usually the outcome of an unsuitable marriage ; the perpetual friction of two natures at variance. Differences arise over everything, including the training and punishment of the children ; favouritism is shown—sometimes intentionally—and consequent harshness and injustice meted out to the less favoured off-spring ; sides are taken, and with some ill-fated quarrel the campaign of a life-time is begun. Children of such homes are bound to grow up with a pronounced bias, allying themselves to the side that commands their affections, whilst instincts of aversion are roused against the opposing side. Sometimes, however, in averagely happy homes, and with no apparent cause, an unreasonable dislike is felt for a particular member of the family. Loyalty, a sense of seemliness, or even shame, may and do impose silence, but there are instances, so flagrantly obvious, that no silence could conceal the correct state of affairs.

The usual division in families is the siding of girls with the father, sons with the mother, but this is subject to variation. The two instances, in which mothers have themselves told me they hated a certain one of their children, are in the one case a son, the other a daughter. With regard to the son, his very sex was against him, a girl and not a boy had been wanted ; in the case of the daughter, who followed too closely on the steps of her brother, no child was wished for ; therefore both started life handicapped. It is easy enough to say these things should not be—but, *they are*. Probably in the present imperfect condition of human existence there are no individuals free from a certain dislike for some fellow-creature ; let these anti-pathetic natures be perpetually thrown together in the closest intimacy, and the sense of aversion will in all probability rapidly develop into one of hatred. In the case of the above exceptional extremes, two antagonistic natures happen to belong to parent and child : therein lies the hopelessness of the problem.

Children when in a passion will sometimes say they hate their parents, but this does not as a rule mean much. I do, however, know a little girl who frankly hates her mother ; once, when writing a weekly letter home, she began, "dear mother," then turning to a school-fellow and pointing to the words with her pen, she said : "I write that, but I don't

mean it, I hate her." When these conditions exist I see no possible solution but separation till the growth of the children has brought a change in their position at home. To command people to love is useless. To force antagonistic tendencies is worse than hopeless. The individual parents and children instanced, know perfectly well they *ought* to love each other, but that does not engender any sense of affection, or bring them any nearer. I know members of families irreparably separated from each other, husbands from wives, children from parents, brothers from sisters ; silence as of death divides them, or they meet as mere casual acquaintances.

It would seem as if the maternal instinct were waning. Women confessedly shirk the responsibilities of motherhood. Others submit to unnatural measures rather than face the discomfort of the normal nine months decreed by nature, thereby bringing into the world children heavily handicapped for the battle with life, whilst women of the wealthier classes habitually refuse to nurse their own children—even when they can, which is not always the case. Paternal affection seems generally weak. The master of a large workhouse told me that the majority of women and children were there owing to the "desertion" by husbands and fathers. Wealthier fathers, in never seeing or interesting themselves in their children are doing the same thing, only, by reason of class, it works out differently. I once attracted a man's attention to what struck me as a charming picture, *i.e.*, a mother seated on a door-step, holding a young baby on her knee. "How could you!" was the response, "the sight of a baby makes me feel physically sick," and he was the father of two children. Such indications as these point to the degeneracy of a people. "lovers of their own selves without natural affection."

In the animal world we find family life as typified by natural instincts. Here, each species normally reproduces "after its kind." The mother guards and tends her young till such time as they are able to fend for themselves, when—as the eagle ruffles her nest in order that her young may take wing—she leaves them to fare forth into the world of individual experience. I believe it would be more satisfactory if the human family were more closely modelled on this natural

type. Were children brought up with a view to future independence, fully equipped to earn their own living, there would be less sense of restraint at home, less consciousness of irksome limitations. But sentiment, "the distraction of our modern age," steps in, and says it would be "unkind" (such being the objection used after I had propounded the above statement to a mother, notwithstanding that each of her three daughters had—with no special preparation—to practically make their own way in the world). It is the natural law that grown men and women should be independent, or making new homes for themselves, and, it is an unnatural condition which keeps adult sons and daughters under one roof, the result is bound to be more or less unsatisfactory.

To generalise, broadly, I should say that poor parents, living simpler lives, less distracted from the more primitive needs, are frequently fonder of their children than more well-to-do parents. Here family life approaches more nearly the natural type. The mother fatalistically accepts the consequences of married life. She nurses and tends her babies herself, and personally sees to the wants of her children. They, in their turn, grow up with the knowledge that as soon as they are able, they will have to earn their own living, from which time they will become independent, or paying lodgers in their old home.

The well-to-do mother employs the "middle-man." She neither nurses nor personally tends her babies. If she has them downstairs, and they happen to cry, she promptly banishes them to the nursery. To the majority of women the education of their children is purely a conventional matter; a certain school happens to be the fashion, so it is sure to be all right. School-days over, boys leave home and rightly strive to make their own way in the world. Girls are expected to marry, and failing to do so, are tacitly accepted as failures; or, knowing what is expected of them, they marry men for whom they have little or no affection, and thus follows the unsatisfactory cycle of family relations.

The examples of satisfactory homes I could instance are invariably the outcome of happy marriages. The children are born into, and grow up in, an atmosphere of love. Never hearing disputes and dissension, there is less tendency amongst

the children to quarrel. They are, for the most part, finer specimens physically than the unwanted, and therefore more mentally fit for the struggle for place and position in the world. Knowing what love is, they are less likely to err in their own marriages, and thus is perpetuated a strong and worthy line.

For men and women consciously branded with an hereditary taint to forego the pleasure of children in their marriage, is altogether honourable. But, for young people, meditating marriage on an insufficient income, to calmly discuss the expediency of marrying with the idea of having no children, is to me wholly immoral and despicable. Why, indeed, should they marry at all? Such half-marriages must inevitably miss the underlying spirit of such contracts in which love only finds its perfected completion in the new life resulting from such a union. Men and women who marry on the strength of such a previously concerted arrangement are surely "wanting in natural affection lovers of their own selves."

[Discussion is invited.—Editor.]

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NOTES OF LESSONS.

[We have thought that it might be of use to our readers (in families and schools) to publish occasionally Notes of Lessons prepared by students of the House of Education for the pupils of the Practising School. We should like to say, however, that such a Lesson is never given as a *tour de force*, but is always an illustration or an expansion of some part of the children's regular studies (in the *Parents' Review School*), of some passage in one or other of their school books.—ED.]

I.

Subject : Latin.

Group : Language. Class III. Time : 30 minutes.

BY CATHERINE L. NELIGAN.

OBJECTS.

- I. To increase the girls' interest in Latin.
- II. To increase the girls' power of reflection by encouraging them to trace the Latin origin of words in our own language.
- III. To improve their Latin pronunciation.
- IV. To facilitate their translation.
- V. To increase their knowledge of Latin grammar.

LESSON.

Step I.—Give the girls a short exercise on the Latin vowels, consonants, and diphthongs, illustrating their approximate sounds on the blackboard as follows :

| Vowels | Sounded as in | Latin example (from lesson) |
|------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| ā .. | ahā ! | ārido |
| ă .. | ăha ! | ăquilă |
| ē .. | spăde | tĕla |
| ě .. | spĕd | tamen ; |
| ī .. | feet | ūniversī |
| ĭ .. | fit | ĭd |
| ō .. | nōte | nōtus |
| ő .. | nōt | fovea |
| ū .. | shōe | dūcunt |
| ű .. | shōök | apūd |
| Diphthongs | Sounded as in | Latin example |
| ae .. | āisle | notae |
| au .. | cow | auxilium |
| oe .. | boil | proclum |

Step II.—Girls to read the vocabulary, noticing the gender of each word, also those which resemble any of our English words.